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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IZ TU

SUBJECT: MFA RAISES TURKEY-US RELATIONS AND KIRKUK

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: MFA Undersecretary Tuygan told the Ambassador January 18 that the only significant problem in Turkey-US relations was Iraq. He identified three specific issues regarding Iraq -- a feeling that Turkey's contributions (especially in encouraging election participation) are not appreciated; the lack of any measures against the PKK/Kongra Gel in Iraq; and, a perception that the US is ignoring Turkish warnings about developments in Kirkuk. The Ambassador agreed that the USG and GOT had some tactical differences in Iraq despite agreement on overall objectives. He refuted Tuygan's assertions that Turkey was ignored (on Kirkuk) or unappreciated (for its contribution). He also explained how even non-military action against the PKK/Kongra Gel would necessitate some security force participation and that was not possible for the time being. He assured Tuygan that the recent high-level engagement we have had with Turkey on Iraq and other issues would continue, pointing to the expected visit of USDP Feith at the end of the month. The two agreed that better public diplomacy by both sides was important to expanding cooperation. End Summary.

Iraq's Weight on US-Turkey Relations

¶12. (C) MFA Undersecretary Ali Tuygan invited the Ambassador to his office January 18. Tuygan was joined by Iraq Coordinator Ambassador Osman Koruturk and Iraq Department Head Avni Botsali. Although the meeting was billed as to discuss Iraq, Tuygan explained that its origin had been an internal MFA meeting the previous week to explore ways to improve Turkey-US relations. Quickly, he said, the conversation turned to Iraq. Tuygan worried that frequent statements that the US and Turkey share the same objectives in Iraq were simply papering over a bigger problem. We have no significant problems elsewhere; all our problems lie to the south. The Ambassador responded that he believed Turkey and the US really did have the same goal of a united, democratic Iraq that was not a haven for terrorists of any kind. While there were non-official voices in the US calling for a different outcome, the USG's goals were clear. That said, there were tactical differences between Ankara and Washington over how to reach the objective. There was also a widespread understanding within the USG that negative public opinion in Turkey about our operations in Iraq weighed on the relationship. This made dialogue important, even if we did not agree on everything. The flow of high-level visitors to Ankara was not going to end soon, he added, pointing to USDP Doug Feith's expected visit here Jan. 31 to Feb. 1.

Turkey's Contribution Not Appreciated

¶13. (C) Tuygan identified three particular problems regarding Iraq. First, there was a sense in Ankara that Turkey's contribution to the political process was not appreciated. Turkey had been cooperating in substantial ways and intends to continue to do so. When new issues arose, the GOT tried to look at them in a positive light. He pointed to a "transformation of our (Turkey's) policy and attitude" over the past few months. Other neighbors (read: Iran) were "in the field" and trying to influence events, but Turkey felt "isolated," trying to contribute to the political process rather than thwart it. For example, the GOT was publicly encouraging all groups to participate in elections, and had been focusing privately on Sunnis.

¶14. (C) The Ambassador responded that the USG does appreciate Turkey's contributions to success in Iraq, as both Deputy Secretary Armitage and CENTCOM Commander GEN Abizaid made

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clear in their recent visits. He allowed that the lack of a military contribution to the coalition might impact on Turkey's visibility on developments on the ground. To help, the Ambassador said, he understood that Task Force Olympia (TFO) Commander BG Ham had offered to allow the Turks to increase the number of liaison officers it has with his command in Mosul and subordinate commands elsewhere in TFO's AOR. On Turkey's efforts to widen participation in the Iraqi election, he expressed appreciation and encouraged them to

continue.

No Non-Military Action Against PKK/Kongra Gel

15. (C) Another issue on the bilateral agenda was the PKK/Kongra Gel presence in Iraq, Tuygan continued. The trilateral talks Jan. 11 had not produced much. At the same time, GEN Abizaid called for increased use of Incirlik, putting Foreign Minister Gul "in a difficult spot." While Turkey understood the US's "lack of desire or ability" to take military action against these terrorists, there was no indication that non-military measures would be taken either. In a meeting he had with Iraqi MFA Undersecretary Bayati, Tuygan had raised the issue of PKK/Kongra Gel front parties registering for the Iraqi elections. Bayati offered to take this issue up after the elections if Turkey presented evidence that the parties were fronts. Tuygan found his response hard to understand, exclaiming, "We are not talking about a political process like Sweden's."

16. (C) The Ambassador reminded Tuygan that we have no significant forces north of the green line and, given the security situation elsewhere, none to spare to deploy there. Moreover, even many of the "non-military" actions, such as closing front offices, require some commitment of security forces to ensure compliance. There are no spare forces to do this at the moment. The fact is, many in Turkey (especially the media) over-estimate US capabilities. Regarding the front parties participating in the elections, the Ambassador continued, we, like Turkey, had raised the issue with the Iraq election commission (IECI), but they are supposed to be an independent body. If we were to impose our will, it could undermine everything we are trying to do to build an independent Iraq.

Turkey's Biggest Concern: Kirkuk

17. (C) A third issue, but the one with the greatest potential to blow up, Tuygan said, was Kirkuk. According to the former election commissioner in Kirkuk, the Kurds secured an extension of registration in exchange for agreeing to participate in elections there. The GOT would like to issue a positive statement on January 31 about the elections, but with Arabs and Turkmen talking of boycotts, Tuygan wasn't sure whether this would be possible. If the trends continue, the Kurds will produce a "distorted outcome." FM Gul shares this concern and had asked Tuygan to convey it to the Ambassador, he said.

18. (C) Turning to local elections, Tuygan recalled negotiations in Kirkuk to distribute the seats on the city council equally among the Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, with a lesser number reserved for Christians. The original proposal of 13/13/13/2 respectively was later modified to 12/12/12/5. All parties agreed except Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Because of the extended registration, Barzani believed Kurds could win up to half of the council seats, so the KDP reportedly backed out of the deal. The GOT, however, believed the 13/13/13/2 idea had merit: it would demonstrate the multiethnic nature of the city and would bode well as the constitution drafters considered Kirkuk's special status. It also would help prevent sparking ethnic strife in the city. Koruturk added that the Arabs in Kirkuk shared this concern as well.

19. (C) The Ambassador said that he was not aware of the state of play on negotiation of electoral alliances or lists for the Kirkuk city council. But on the larger issue, Turkish sensitivities about Kirkuk were well understood within the USG. Moreover, we shared many of the same concerns about the potential for ethnic conflict. Kirkuk was subject to complex social engineering by Saddam's regime, and the victims of this -- all of them, including the Arabs resettled from the south and the Turkmen forced out like the Kurds -- needed to be treated fairly in a legal and transparent manner. Regarding the extended registration in Kirkuk, it should be seen in the context of other extraordinary measures the IECI was taking to ensure the widest possible participation in Iraq's election throughout the country; this was not something unique to Kirkuk.

Doing Better Public Diplomacy

10. (C) Returning to his opening theme, Tuygan said that despite the US and Turkey sharing objectives in Iraq, developments on the ground were "a problem." Kirkuk would be a "test case" for Turkey and the region, he asserted. Given the problem with public opinion in Turkey on Iraq, finding ways to expand Turkey's cooperation will be difficult if the situation in Iraq is viewed as "going nowhere." While the US

may not have as much control over events in Iraq as people in Turkey believed, the situation should not get out of control, he concluded. The Ambassador agreed that negative public opinion made cooperation more difficult and that the US needed to do a better job at public diplomacy. "So do we," Tuygan quickly added. The Ambassador undertook to continue passing releasable information to MFA and TGS so officials could make well informed statements on developments.

¶11. (C) Tuygan concluded by saying that he would tell the MFA spokesman to portray this meeting as a review of relations after the new year.

¶12. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN